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Reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on policy development and evaluation

Report of the High Commissioner

Summary

This report, covering the period from July 2013 through June 2014, is provided pursuant to the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to consider reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation during its annual plenary session (A/AC.96/1003, para. 25. 1. (f) (vi)).

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I. Introduction

1. UNHCR is committed to ensuring the systematic evaluation and assessment of the Office's policies, programmes, projects, partnerships and practices. Responsibility for these functions is substantively vested in the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), working in cooperation with relevant divisions and bureaux.

2. During the period under review, the Office has maintained its commitment to policy development and evaluation, whilst initiating a process of re-appraisal and reform of the function of evaluation within UNHCR, including how an added, decentralized evaluation function could best be pursued. Through PDES, the Office promotes rigorous research on relevant issues and encourages an active exchange of ideas and analysis between UNHCR and its partners. All of these activities are undertaken with the purpose of strengthening UNHCR's ability to fulfill its mandate in an effective and efficient manner.[1]

II. Evaluation capacity and staffing

3. A review of UNHCR's evaluation capacity, conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and presented to the fifty-third session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CBC) in June 2013[2], made recommendations in five areas: (i) establishing a dedicated and discrete evaluation unit at headquarters with responsibility for conducting cross-cutting strategic evaluations; (ii) revising UNHCR's evaluation policy; (iii) strengthening the rigor and utility of UNHC's programme evaluations; (iv) developing a systematic process for follow-up to evaluation recommendations; and (v) developing a strategy for strengthening decentralized evaluation in the field.

4. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/20, the OIOS report will be further considered by the CBC at its fifty-fifth session, in conjunction with an OIOS programme evaluation of UNHCR that is currently underway and will be completed in early 2015. While the structure of the evaluation function within UNHCR will be subject to further discussion, taking into account current policy and relevant best practice, work has progressed towards improving evaluation policy, methodology, tools and procedures. A draft revised evaluation policy framework, outlining the responsibilities for evaluation across the organization and establishing criteria for the inclusion of programme evaluations in the annual work plan, will soon be reviewed by the High Commissioner. The revised policy framework also refines an approach to follow-up mechanisms for recommendations and for management responses that was initiated last year. The Office has begun an internal assessment of how best to embrace decentralized evaluation at the operational level by examining the approaches of other large field-based organizations. Additional analysis is being pursued on the structures, systems, and resources required to implement this recommendation.

5. In order to further strengthen UNHCR's evaluation capacity, an additional Senior Evaluation Expert post has been established as part of the High Commissioner's Capacity Building Initiative (CBI). It is anticipated that the post will be filled by the end of the year. Current PDES staff members have also undergone specialized training in evaluation.

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[1] Evaluations, reviews and research papers referenced in this document may be accessed at: www.unhcr.org/pages/4a1d28526.html.

[2] E/AC.51/2013/5. Available at: www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/ga_report/e-ac-51-2013-5-unhcr.pdf.

III. Evaluations and reviews

6. Over the last year, PDES has overseen a range of evaluations and reviews of policy and programmatic issues related to protection, emergency response and durable solutions. Increasingly, these evaluations and reviews have made use of independent external expertise.

7. In the area of protection, PDES completed a comprehensive review of UNHCR's role in assisting States with the assumption of responsibility for refugee status determination (RSD). The review focused on the organizational and procedural aspects of the transition to nationally-led and managed RSD processes and institutions. Building on the insights generated by the review, a series of future evaluations will assess operations that have recently transitioned to State-led RSD, or are in the process of doing so, with the objective of informing the development of guidelines and benchmarks for successful transition.

8. Work on solutions included a review of UNHCR's engagement with assisted voluntary return programmes and a review of UNHCR's strategic use of resettlement. The Office also commissioned and published reviews of UNHCR's policy and practice on voluntary repatriation and integration of resettled refugees in labour markets. As part of ongoing work on urban refugees, the Office conducted reviews of the implementation of the 2009 urban refugee policy in Ecuador and India. It has also commissioned a review of UNHCR's response to xenophobia in South Africa that will be finalized in the second half of 2014.

9. In the context of emergency operations, the Office commissioned independent evaluations of its utilization of the Central Emergency Response Fund as well as its response to the Syrian refugee emergency in Jordan and Lebanon. Building on the 2013 real-time evaluation undertaken by PDES and non-governmental organization partners in northern Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, the evaluations of the response to the Syrian refugee emergency were commissioned in March 2014 will be completed in the second half of the year. The terms of reference were designed following preparatory field missions undertaken in December 2013 and took into account the major increase in refugee numbers in the region. A second real-time evaluation addressed UNHCR's response to the Sudanese refugee emergency in South Sudan.

10. Other issues reviewed included livelihoods programming and UNHCR's mental health and psycho-social support for persons of concern and for staff. Work is progressing on a review of UNHCR's use of auxiliary staff — notably United Nations Volunteers and personnel recruited under arrangements with the UN Office for Project Services — and a scoping study on UNHCR's policies toward the use of micro-credit and employment incentives for refugees.

IV. Other activities

11. PDES continued to support effective implementation of the urban refugee policy, notably through an interactive website, www.urbangoodpractices.org. The website provides a repository for tools and guidelines, research and multi-media resources, as well as a platform for a community of practitioners to share best practices. In conjunction with the Global Learning Centre, PDES coordinated the creation of a series of on-line courses on working with urban refugees, the Urban Refugee Learning Programme (URLP).

V. Research and publications

12. The Office continued its support of independent research through the 'New Issues in Refugee Research' series. Seventeen papers were published during the reporting period on topics including: ceasefires and durable solutions in Myanmar; trends in Somali refugee displacement; livelihoods and migration among Liberian refugees; the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder in refugee status determination; and community integration in the context of rural refugee resettlement.

VI. External relations and inter-agency evaluations

13. As focal point for external and inter-agency reviews and evaluations, PDES has supported preparatory work for OIOS's programme evaluation of UNHCR. Additional liaison activities included steering the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) review; facilitating initial preparatory discussions for an effectiveness review of the evaluation function, commissioned by the Government of the Netherlands; and participating in annual meetings of the United Nation's Evaluation Group and the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian action (ALNAP). PDES has also represented the Office in the Steering Group of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) group, established under the *aegis* of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and the management group of the forthcoming inter-agency evaluation of the South Sudan situation.